

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0432

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

CINCLANTFLT

COMNAVINTCOM

USINCSO

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUCHAREST 4682

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: AR, RO

SUBJECT: ARGENTINE JUNTA MEMBER VISITS ROMANIA

REF: BUENOS AIRES 4519

1. SUMMARY: ARGENTINE NAVY COMMANDER AND JUNTA MEMBER EMILIO MASSERA'S THREE-DAY VISIT TO ROMANIA RECEIVED ROUTINE TREATMENT IN ROMANIAN MEDIA, AND ITINERARY ITSELF WAS UNEXCEPTIONAL. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH US, HOWEVER, MASSERA AND NAVY SECRETARY EDUARDO FRACASSI ELABORATED AT SOME LENGTH ON REASONS FOR THE TRIP, US-ARGENTINE RELATIONS, AND THE ARGEN-

TINE POLITICAL SCENE. WE REPORT THEIR COMMENTS AS OF POSSIBLE INTEREST TO THOSE FOLLOWING ARGENTINE AFFAIRS. END SUMMARY.

2. PUBLICALLY, JUNE 28-JULY 1 VISIT OF ARGENTINE JUNTA
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MEMBER ADMIRAL EMILIO MASSERA TO ROMANIA WAS TOTALLY ROUTINE. HE WAS OFFICIALLY THE GUEST OF STEFAN VOITEC, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT (AMONG OTHER POSITIONS) OF SOCIALIST UNITY FRONT, ROMANIA'S UMBREALLA POLITICAL ORGANIZATION WHICH INCLUDES THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND A MELANGE OF CIVIC AND INTEREST GROUPS. MASSERA HAD TWO SESSIONS WITH CEASUDESCU AND SEPARATE MEETINGS WITH FOREIGN TRADE

MINISTER BURTICA, MINISTER OF DEFENSE COMAN, FOREIGN MINISTER ANDREI, AND LABOR MINISTER PANA. HE WAS GUEST OF HONOR AT VARIOUS CEREMONIAL AFFAIRS, VISITED A BUCHAREST URBAN RENEWAL AREA, AND TOURED TWO FACTORIES IN NEARBY PETROLEUM REFINING CENTER OF PLOESTI. HE DEPARTED BUCHAREST FOR LONDON.

3. ACCORDING TO ARGENTINES, HOWEVER, POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE WAS MUCH BROADER THAN ROMANIAN SCHEDULED OF EVENTS WOULD INDICATE. FOLLOWING COMMENTS WERE GLEANED JUNE 30 DURING FIFTEEN MINUTE SEMI-PRIVATE CONVERSATION BETWEEN MASSERA AND POLITICAL COUNSELOR AND MUCH LONGER ONE-ON-ONE SESSION WITH VICE ADMIRAL EDUARDO FRANCASSI, SECRETARY GENERAL OF ARGENTINE NAVY WHO WAS SERVING AS MASSERA'S CHIEF ASSISTANT ON TRIP. (NOTE: OTHER ADMIRALS, ALBERTO MOSCHINI OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S EAST EUROPEAN SECTION, AND COUNTLESS ENLISTED NAVY SPEAR-CARRIERS AND SECURITY MEN FORMED THE REST OF OFFICIAL PARTY).

4. WHY A JUNKET TO ROMANIA?

IN REPLY TO EMBOFF'S OBSERVATION THAT BUCHAREST IS GRACED WITH VERY FEW HIGH LEVEL VISITORS FROM LATIN AMERICA, MASSERA SAID A MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO OPEN NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR BILATERAL TRADE. FOLLOW-UP TO ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL AGREEMENTS SIGNED DURING CEAUSESCU'S MARCH 1974 VISIT TO ARGENTINA HAS BEEN HALF-HEARTED AT BEST, YET GOA SEES GREAT UNTAPPED

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TRADE POTENTIAL IN EASTERN EUROPE; WHERE BETTER TO START WITH A SERIOUS EXPLORATION OF IT THAN ROMANIA WHERE A LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALREADY EXISTS? IN AN INTRIGUING ADDENDA WHICH WE WERE UNABLE TO CLARIFY, MASSERA ALSO SAID ARGENTINA IS INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING FISHING RIGHTS AND LAW OF THE SEA CONSIDERATIONS WITH GOR.

5. FRACASSI WAS MORE FORTHCOMING. TRADE IS AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION, ESPECIALLY MEAT. AS PERIODIC OUTBREAKS OF AFTOSA HAVE LIMITED ACCEPTABILITY OF ARGENTINE MEAT PRODUCTS IN US AND EEC COUNTRIES, ARGENTINA PERFORCE MUST DEVELOP NEW MARKETS, AND ROMANIA COULD BECOME BOTH A VALUED CUSTOMER AND A GATEWAY INTO COMECON. AND, HE ADDED, TRIP PER SE WOULD HELP MASSERA'S IMAGE AS AN INTERNATIONAL STATEMAN, A USEFUL POLITICAL ASSET BACK HOME.

6. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO FRACASSI, SHOOING AWAY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY MAN, "IN GREAT SECRECY" THERE WAS ANOTHER REASON FOR MASSERA'S TRIP--THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION. WHEN POL COUNSELOR EXPRESSED TOTAL ASTONISHMENT AND INCREDULITY THAT GOA OR MASSERA PERSONALLY WOULD (OR COULD) BECOME INVOLVED IN THAT PARTICULAR QUAGMIRE, FRACASSI STRONGLY

ASSERTED THAT MASSERA ENJOYED THE POLITICAL SUPPORT OF
A HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL AND WEALTH GROUP OF CONSERVATIVE

"TURCO" (ARAB? LEBANESE?) BUSINESSMEN IN BUENOS AIRES WHO
WERE DEEPLY INTERESTED IN PLAYING A ROLE, HOWEVER SMALL,
IN STABILIZING THE AREA. SINCE CEAUSESCU WAS KNOWN TO BE
IN TOUCH WITH ALL SIDES IN THE DISPUTE, HE MAKES AN IDEAL "CON-
TACT POINT), VIA MASSERA, FOR THIS GROUP. FURTHER, HE
ADDED, ARGENTINA (READ MASSERA AND COMPANY) SEES THE
ABSOLUTE NEED TO OBTAIN NEW INTERNATIONAL SOURCES OF
FUNDING AS "YOU GRINGOS" AND OTHER TRADITIONAL
SOURCES HAVE TURNED OFF THE CREDIT SPIGOT; PETRODOLLARS
FROM SAUDI ARABIA LOOK LIKE "A REAL POSSIBILITY", AND
MASSERA'S TURCO FRIENDS ARE WORKING THIS ANGLE. SO, HE
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CONCLUDED, WE REALLY ARE INTERESTED IN WHAT HAPPENS IN
MIDDLE EAST.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUCHAREST 4682

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7. US-ARGENTINE RELATIONS

MASSERA GENTLY AND FRACASSI POINTEDLY TOOK STANDARD LATIN AMERICAN LINE THAT "YOU AMERICANS" DO NOT UNDERSTAND ARGENTINA'S PROBLEMS AND THAT U.S. ACTIONS ARE AT BEST COUNTERPRODUCTIVE AND AT WORST CATASTROPHIC. BOTH MEN READILY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT AMBASSADOR CASTRO AND POL COUNSELOR HALLMAN WITH WHOM THEY HAVE HAD "FRANK AND INTIMATE" CONVERSATIONS ARE WELL AWARE OF "TRUE" SITUATION, BUT WASHINGTON POLICY MAKERS HAD APPARENTLY CHOSEN TO IGNORE THEIR ADVICE. POL COUNSELOR USED STANDARD REBUTTAL THAT ROLE OF ALL U.S. EMBASSY OFFICIALS IS TO REPORT FULLY AND FRANKLY ALL VIEWS WITHOUT BECOMING ADVOCATES OR PARTICIPANTS IN LOCAL POLITICS ("WHICH MIGHT BE TERMED INTERVENTION IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS, WHICH YOU CONFIDENTIAL

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WOULD NOT WELCOME, WOULD YOU?"); WASHINGTON POLICYMAKERS MUST TAKE ACCOUNT OF TOTAL U.S. WORLDWIDE AND DOMESTIC INTERESTS. MASSERA LAID GREAT STRESS ON HIS RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH FORMER SECRETARY KISSINGER IN BUENOS AIRES, AND ADDED THAT HE INTENDED TO MAKE A "PRIVATE" VISIT TO U.S. IN JULY OR AUGUST, INCLUDING A STOP IN WASHINGTON. POL COUNSELOR OBSERVED THAT AMBASSADOR CASTRO AND HIS STAFF WOULD PROBABLY BE HAPPY TO SUGGEST NAMES OF INTERESTING CONVERSATION PARTNERS FOR HIM. INTERESTINGLY, SUBJECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS NEVER CAME UP DIRECTLY.

8. MASSERA AND ARGENTINE POLITICS

ASKED IF HE SAW HIMSELF AS A FUTURE PRESIDENT OF ARGENTINA, MASSERA GAVE A HEAVILY QUALIFIED YES. SITUATION TODAY, HOWEVER, IS ONE OF BUILDING POLITICAL FORCES. "I CONTROL THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT", SAID MASSERA, AND THERE ARE OTHER SIGNIFICANT GROUPS THAT "KEEP KNOCKING ON MY DOOR". YET "YOU AMERICANS SEEM TO SEE ME AS A LATER-DAY PERON"; POL COUNSELOR ADMITTED THAT HE COULD SEE HOW SUCH CONFUSION COULD ARISE.

9. FRACASSI ELABORATED. MASSERA IS CONSCIOUSLY PUTTING AS MUCH DAYLIGHT AS POSSIBLE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE "DISCREDITED" POLICIES OF GENERAL VIDELA AND THE ARMY. MANY IMPORTANT ACTORS SEE MASSERA AS A WAY OUT OF PRESENT POLITICAL/ECONOMIC DEAD END, AND ARE OFFERING THEIR SUPPORT. A MAN ON A WHITE CRUISER?, POL COUNSELOR ASKED; TO AN EXTENT; FRACASSI REPLIED, SINCE THERE IS A LITTLE OF THE CAUDILLO IN ALL ARGENTINES. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, SUCH GROUPS AS THE YOUNGER RADICALES WHO ARE FLOCKING TO MASSERA'S SIDE SEE IN HIM A MAN WHO CAN UNLEASH THE CREATIVE ENERGIES OF THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS WHILE

CONTROLLING AND CHANNELING SOME OF THE MORE DESTRUCTIVE
IMPULSES OF PERONISM AND ITS LABOR MOVEMENT; IN SUCH A SCENARIO,
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TERRORISM WILL WITHER AWAY AND ARGENTINA WILL ASSUME ITS
"RIGHTFUL" ROLE IN FAMILY OF NATIONS. IN SPITE OF TRADITIONAL
SERVICE RIVALRIES, MASSERA ENJOYS SUPPORT EVEN AMONG JUNIOR
AND MIDDLE-GRADE ARMY OFFICERS. CONSEQUENTLY,
WHILE IMMEDIATE FUTURE BEYOND MASSERA'S RETIREMENT FROM THE
NAVY THIS FALL IS "UNDEFINED", HE WILL CONTINUE TO BE A
LEADING ACTOR ON ARGENTINE POLITICAL SCENE. RIGHT NOW,
1980 LOOKS LIKE A CRUCIAL YEAR, AND MASSERA'S POLITICAL
EFFORTS ARE FOCUSED ON THAT DATE.

10. FRACASSI WAS ALSO EXTREMELY CRITICAL OF CURRENT
GOA ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL POLICIES. WHILE MASSERA HAS
AVOIDED A FRONTAL CONFRONTATION WITH MARTINEZ DE LA HOZ,
RELATIONS ARE VERY STRAINED. ASKED IF THE MASSERA TEAM
WOULD THEREFORE PROPOSE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS, FRACASSI
BACKTRACKED AND ADMITTED THAT HIS GROUP'S ECONOMIC THINK-
ING HAD NOT YET JELLED. BUT, HE ADDED, THIS WILL BE A
PRIME TOPIC ON MASSERA'S UPCOMING TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES.

11. COMMENT: FROM OUR LIMITED VANTAGE POINT HERE AND
BASED ON VERY BRIEF ACQUAINTANCE, WE AGREE WITH EMBASSY
BUENOS AIRES' ASSESSMENT (REFTEL) THAT MASSERA IS A
SLIPPERY CUSTOMER WHO BEARS CLOSE WATCHING. ON SURFACE
ACQUAINTANCE, HE IMPRESSES US AS EQUAL PARTS IDEALISM,
POLITICAL SAVVY, AND AMBITION. ON FRACASSI, WHILE WE ARE
IN NO POSITION TO EVALUATE HIS TECHNICAL SKILLS AS A
SAILOR, HE STRIKES US AS HAVING COME FROM THE CLASSICAL
MOLD OF UNIFORMED LATIN AMERICAN POLITICAL MANIPULATORS/
CONSPIRATORS; HE HAS CLEARLY ATTACHED HIMSELF TO MASSERA'S
POLITICAL FORTUNES AND FULLY EXPECTS TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE
IN THEM AND IN ANY FUTURE MASSERA GOVERNMENT. COMMENTS
FROM BOTH ARE REPORTED FULLY, NOT IN EXPECTATION THAT THEY
WILL SHED ANY GREAT LIGHT ON ARGENTINE POLITICAL PROCESS
BUT AS OF POSSIBLE INTEREST FOR LINE THEY TOOK IN PRIVATE
CONVERSATIONS IN BUCHAREST. A HIGHLY-PLACES, VETERAN ROMANIAN
OBSERVER OF LATIN AMERICAN AFFAIRS TOLD US THAT GOR WAS
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INTERESTED IN ACCEEDING TO MASSERA'S REQUEST FOR INVITATION
SINCE ROMANIANS CONSIDER ARGENTINA A COUNTRY WITH A VAST,
UNREALIZED POTENTIAL AND MASSERA AS A MAN TO WATCH. THAT
IS AS GOOD A NUTSHELL SUMMARY AS ANY.

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